

KOONCE, J. B. INTERVIEW

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Billie Byrd
Field Worker
5-26-37.

An interview with J. B. Koonce,
Okemah, Oklahoma.

A PLAINSMAN.

I have witnessed and been in the movement for fifty-four years as a plainsman to bring the state into civilization, establish peace with the wild Indians and turn them to the better light.

I have an Osage mark on my side that I got in the battle with the Osage in the valley of the Washita, and a bullet mark on my right cheek received from a shot of 22 rifle while on duty as the first policeman in Oklahoma city.

General Philip H. Sheridan was the highest officer at that time, 1868, while General George A. Custer of the Seventh U. S. Cavalry had the active command of the field forces with main headquarters at Fort Hayes. I served under General Custer when attempts were being made to check the different uprisings of the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Osage and other plains Indians. I, also, served under the

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chief of the government scouts, Wild Bill Hickok.

The Indians have often been called the wild Indians yet they did not run from you but they would run to you. They were real fighters, were never known to retreat unless nothing else could be done. Either you had the Indian or they had you. The only way to have advantage of the Indian was to slip upon them unawares in the early hours of the morning or at daybreak.

The Osage Indians were in their winter camp in the Washita valley near the present Cheyenne in the winter of 1868. It was extremely cold with snow on the ground, when Custer placed his men on four sides of the camp to make an attack.

The men waited all Wednesday night without so much as making a fire until early on the morning of Thursday, November 4, 1868, when they swooped down upon the sleeping Osage camp. The Indians were not expecting an attack so they fought with anything that they could get. But General Custer had the start and had the more advantage.

Sometimes the Indians would whip us. During one time, some of the plains Indians had us surrounded and we fought for two days.

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J. B. Koonce is an old man and relates that he has been in every uprising of the Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Osage and other plains Indians and if given plenty of time could really relate some very interesting incidents, but he cannot remember much now. He has belonged to the Historical Society at one time, and he now lives in peace in the home of his son-in-law, J. A. Foglesong, assistant postmaster, Okemah, Oklahoma.